

Success Story

Erie County



Chris Collins
County Executive

Anthony J. Billittier IV, M.D., FACEP
Commissioner of Health

Department of Health

Specialized Medical Assistance Response Team (SMART) / National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) Patient Reception Exercise

On May 1, 2008, a fictitious act of terrorism in a metropolitan area of Virginia occurred. Due to the unknown nature and substance of the attack and explosion, area hospitals were evacuated for safety reasons and to ensure adequate bed availability for injured military personnel. All of the hospitals and nursing homes were evacuated through a VA/DoD PT reception operation to North Eastern United States medical facilities.

Later that afternoon, staff from the VA Medical Center in Buffalo activated their National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) partners. In a meeting that afternoon, local responders from the Buffalo Niagara International Airport (BNIA) Fire Department, Niagara Frontier Transportation



Authority, Erie County, Town of Cheektowaga, Town of Amherst, Specialized Medical Assistance Response Team (SMART), Rural/Metro Ambulance, Twin City Ambulance and Lancaster Volunteer Ambulance were informed that NDMS would be evacuating hospitalized patients to BNIA for admission to local hospitals.

The SMART Team had been designated as the patient reception agency for NDMS in the Buffalo area. A call went out to the many volunteer members to participate in the reception of patients on Saturday morning, May 3, 2008. A total of twenty-two (22) volunteers gave up their Saturday to report to the BNIA at 7:00 AM. They were supported by a number of physicians and staff from the Erie County Department of Health and the Department of Emergency Services.



When the Air National Guard plane arrived at BNIA, it was greeted by a host of responders. There were a total of twenty-seven (27) patients at the airport for transfer to area hospitals. Following an initial triage by a physician from the SMART Team, patients were then evacuated from the plane to the Airport Fire Department Station. At the station, they received further evaluation by physicians and nurses.

As ambulances became available, patients were then transferred to area hospitals. The destination was based on a poll conducted by NDMS staff at the time they were notified of the activation. Area hospitals identified beds that could be used to admit patients when the plane arrived.

The SMART Team focused their efforts on triage, patient monitoring and were in a position to provide treatment if it were to become necessary while patients were waiting to be transferred to their final destination.

One significant change from previous exercises was an effort to segregate the "walking wounded" from the patients with more significant injuries and illnesses. This was accomplished by placing these ambulatory patients in a tent adjacent to the Firehouse bays. This minimized the confusion in the area where the more serious patients were monitored and treated while waiting for transportation.

The SMART Team volunteers are a valuable asset that are available to support the medical response in disaster situations. The group was summoned to support Health Department operations during the Surprise October Storm. As an exercise, they were also activated to provide medical support for the Boy Scout Camporall held at Old Fort Niagara State Park in May 2007.

May 2008